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SUBJECT: EU GRAPPLES WITH INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION: DUTCH  
PRESIDENCY TO PRESENT ROADMAP

1. (U) Summary. Approximately 250 experts in migration policy from throughout Europe and North America gathered at a conference hosted by the Dutch Presidency in Amsterdam, September 1-3, to discuss the current state of migration affairs in the EU and to recommend policy options in managing migration flows. The Dutch Presidency will present a multi-year migration strategy paper at an upcoming EU Council meeting of Justice and Interior Ministers on November 5. While many speakers at the conference underscored the positive economic and demographic consequences of immigration, others focused on the political sensitivities which surround the social debate. The inability of European countries to effectively patrol the EU's external borders fuels a popular backlash against migrants. Asylum seekers are viewed with particular disdain as many are thought to be economic migrants making spurious (and costly) requests for international protection. End Summary.

2. (U) Around four to six million foreigners (slightly over one percent of the population) are estimated to be in the EU illegally. Although the percentage and numbers of illegals are lower when compared to the U.S. (around 3 percent or 12 million illegal aliens), concern about immigration remains much stronger in Europe. Even if illegals and other migrants work in jobs most citizens will not fill, including the critically needed domestic, health and care services, Europeans tend to display a lack of hospitality towards them.

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Presidency Strikes Right Chord  
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3. (U) In her keynote address, Dutch Minister for Immigration and Integration Rita Verdonk sketched out an ideal view of a Europe that was open to the world, yet secure. She professed to be unhappy with "Fortress Europe" and said that there was no need for "a new iron curtain between rich and poor." She also emphasized the need for Europe to maintain a humanitarian system, recommending that the best way to keep the hearts and minds of citizens open to the needs of the persecuted was to ensure swift and efficient asylum procedures. Verdonk also said the EU should do more to encourage protection mechanisms in regions of origin, citing the attack on a refugee camp in Burundi as an example of why Europe needed to do more abroad.

4. (U) Even in her rallying call to tackle illegal immigration, Verdonk injected a humanitarian note by referring to the hundreds of migrants intercepted in the Mediterranean on small boats and the many watery graves. She said the growth of illegal immigration enriched organized crime groups which used profits to carry out other illegal enterprises that can "threaten the fabric of our society." According to Verdonk, illegal migrants living on the margins of society overwhelm -- or fall outside -- European social systems. To secure the EU's borders, Verdonk said that travel and residency documents must be made more secure by incorporating biometric identifiers. She also called for improved cooperation with neighbors and expressed hope that the new EU Border Agency would contribute to more secure external frontiers.

5. (U) Verdonk underscored the positive aspects of legal immigration, including cultural ones. She said the immigrants could contribute to stimulating the European economy and thus help the EU fulfill the Lisbon strategy. She also noted that immigration was part of the solution to reversing Europe's demographic decline. Verdonk concluded her remarks by noting, "Immigration is something we can no longer live without, even if we want to live without it."

6. (U) Despite the well-balanced speech, Verdonk was unable to respond convincingly to the questions from the audience which followed. When a British Home Office participant asked how the EU could foster a greater acceptance of immigrants and asylum seekers among its citizens, Verdonk urged greater interagency and international cooperation to address problems. When an Irish Justice Department official asked what political strategy the Dutch Presidency had developed to encourage closer standardization of asylum policies at the European level, Verdonk noted that enlargement had made that task more difficult than it was before. Nonetheless, she

concluded that the Member States had already agreed at the political level to move towards a European system, and thus a way had to be found.

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EU: Already Home to (Productive) Immigrants  
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17. (U) Policy briefs prepared for the conference illustrated via statistics that foreigners are currently present and productive throughout Europe. States with the highest percentage of foreign-born residents (Luxembourg - near 40%, Austria - 25%, Switzerland - 23% and Germany - 13%) are among the wealthiest countries. The percentages of foreign born (including naturalized and other citizens) in these countries surpass those of the U.S. (11%). Other wealthy European countries like the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden and France come close to the U.S. composition with 8-9% foreign-born. Europe's total migrant population is estimated to be 36 - 39 million people, the majority of which originate from outside Europe. The largest blocks of foreigners living in the EU are Turks (2.6 million) and Moroccans (1.4 million).

18. (U) Like the U.S., Europe's net population gain in 2003 (1.3 million people) is attributed principally to immigration. In absolute numbers, Germany, the UK and Italy received the largest numbers of immigrants. However, relative to population size, growth was seen most in Cyprus ( 14 per 1000 inhabitants), Ireland ( 7), and Portugal ( 6). Only in the Baltics and Poland did EU Member States see more emigration than immigration.

19. (U) Unlike the U.S., most of those coming to Europe legally do not do so for family reasons. Family formation (marriage) and reunification accounts for about 30% of Europe's legal immigrants. Numbers in this category are particularly high in Sweden, Belgium and Denmark. A related group includes those coming because of ethnic ties (such as returnees from the former Soviet Union to Germany). Surprisingly, the group singled out by the media for the most criticism -- refugees and asylees -- comprises the smallest number of Europe's legal residents, under 10% of all immigrants.

10. (U) The majority of those immigrating legally to Europe come for economic reasons. When including illegal aliens, labor migrants account for over half the foreign population. Economic streams of immigration are particularly strong in Italy, Portugal, Spain, Ireland and Greece. According to a European Commission (EC) report dated 7-16-2004, migration helps the EU sustain economic growth. Migrants from outside Europe contributed 22% to employment growth for the period from 1997-2002 even though they only comprise 3.6% of the total EU work force. The report concludes that "given the extremely high levels of employment already reached by skilled EU nationals, third countries' labor is increasingly appearing as a major potential which can be tapped to respond to the growing demand for skilled labor while continuing to respond to the demand for low skilled labor."

11. (U) When looking at the EU 15, immigrants (particularly from developing countries) are over-represented in the low-skilled end of the labor market and the high-skill end of the market (mainly immigrants from other developed countries). The following statistics show the ratio between immigrants and native born citizens across the EU 15 average:  
-- Immigrants: low skills (52%), medium skills (28%), high skills (20%)  
-- Natives: low skills (46%), medium skills (38%), high skills (16%)

12. (U) Several speakers at the Amsterdam conference predicted that Europe would increasingly have to compete to attract needed laborers to fill market gaps. Professor Rainer Munz of the Hamburg Institute of International Economics suggested the EU might also consider ways to attract back the 450,000 European scientists and researchers currently working in the U.S. -- or copying the U.S. technique of smoothing transition of foreign students from universities into the labor market. Other suggestions and challenges for policymakers outlined by Munz in his policy brief included:

- facilitating access to permanent residency and citizenship in order to attract needed high skilled immigrants;
- adopting a "point system" in selecting immigrants as done by Canada, or experimenting with "earned regularizations" (which gives residency permanents to illegals who are employed);
- reduce the reliance of the low skills job market on self-selecting illegals;
- help the ten new EU Member States prepare for their transformation into countries of destination for international migrants; and,
- target measures so that certain immigrant groups which perform below the norm in terms of employment and

assimilation (Turks and North Africans) acquire needed skills and abilities to become productive.

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Politics Intrude  
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13. (U) Despite the strong case for immigration, the majority of Europeans would prefer not to open their countries to foreigners. Some say there already too many unemployed (although studies show these will not take jobs filled by low-skilled migrants). Others find the religious values, particularly of Muslim migrants, troubling or repulsive (despite European claims to toleration and multi-culturalism). Finally, the perceived lack of effective tools to control borders leads to resentment of those who enter without authorization and as lawbreakers. For these reasons, anti-immigrant parties have flourished and done well and virtually every national election in the past few years throughout the EU.

14. (U) Rocco Buttiglione, incoming EU Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security ignited a fierce debate in early September after suggesting that camps for migrants attempting to enter the EU illegally be set up in Libya and Tunisia. His comments came as German and Italian interior ministers were discussing a similar initiative. The plan revives a proposal made last year by the UK and ultimately rejected by the EU because of legal, practical and humanitarian concerns. Sweden and UNHCR criticized the lack of adequate protection mechanisms ) a problem intensified by Buttiglione,s identification of Libya as a possible venue. (Note. In his native Italy, the government is also working bilaterally with Libya to stop the flow of migrants from North Africa, the new gateway to Italy for illegals. End Note.) Member of the European Parliament Baroness Sarah Ludford (UK Liberal) assailed the plan as &wacky8 and during a BBC interview noted that it had already been rejected by the Commission for good reasons. She said the Buttiglione can expect a rigorous grilling during his confirmation hearing before the Parliament later this month. Nevertheless, Germany and Italy continue to support the idea (even though the Green party in Germany has broken with Interior Minister Schilly on this point).

15. (U) Buttiglione,s view probably reflects that of the average European. At the Amsterdam conference, other measures were discussed to strengthen the EU,s border controls and to effectively curb abuse in the asylum system. In a workshop on EU borders, participants discussed several proposals for enhancing an integrated approach to the European frontier, including creation of a pool of multinational external border inspectors, establishment of an EU multinational coast guards corps and development of common consular offices and even a single EU visa. The workshop also explored ways of building effective partnerships with migrant-sending and transit countries.

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Ensuring Protection: Here and There  
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16. (U) A separate workshop on asylum and refugee protection focused on the development of a single procedure incorporating refugee and other &subsidiary8 protection mechanisms. While many noted the challenges of consolidating all protection procedures into one, there was general consensus that a single "protection8 procedure is far preferable to disparate ones. Neverthelss, finding consensus on asylum in Europe has been one of the EC's biggest challenges (with Germany often spoiling the consensus).

17. (U) The second half of the workshop focused on a recent EC communication on improving access to durable solutions for refugees, which proposes establishment of an EU-wide refugee resettlement program and an increase in EU resources devoted to enhancing protection for refugees in their regions of origin. While governments spoke generally in favor of these ideas, many voiced skepticism about the ability of migration ministries to affect overseas assistance and development programs. Others (e.g., France) were more blunt, stating that EU citizens and their governments were unlikely to significantly increase their support for overseas refugee programs unless they see clear benefits to themselves (i.e., a reduction in the number of spontaneous arrivals by asylum seekers on their territories).

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Provocative Conclusions  
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18. (U) The conference concluded with several provocative presentations on the way-ahead for Europe on migration policy. Antonis Kastrissianakis, Director of Employment Strategy and European Social Fund policy Development and Coordination, DG Employment and Social Affairs, European

Commission, reminded the audience of the demographic challenges facing the EU for the next several decades and stressed that increased immigration, while not a cure-all to this problem, could help. He encouraged member-states to look at more effective ways of attracting skilled labor (including from the U.S.) and integrating existing migrants. Jan Karlsson, co-chair of the Global Commission on International Migration, summarized the work of the Commission and said his chief lesson learned to date was the importance of taking into account the perspective of the migrant in seeking to develop effective migration policies. Migrants, he noted, do not always respond to the same incentives and disincentives that policymakers in the developed world think they do. A representative from the Dutch Ministry of Justice closed the proceedings by noting that the Netherlands would seek to incorporate the various recommendations made at the conference into the formal conclusions to be developed at the Justice and Home Affairs Council session in November.

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Comment  
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19. (U) The Dutch Presidency, despite its excellent effort to ensure that a balanced view of migration was presented at the conference, should stress measures to beef up the union's external frontiers when it presents its multi-year strategy in November. Likewise, its recommendations on international protection should underscore activities the EU can undertake in refugee producing regions. Acknowledged, but not effectively addressed at the conference, were measures the EU must take to promote the integration of migrants into European societies. That the most visible immigrants come from countries whose values and ways of life frequently collide with host societies, compounds the problem. Whether it be disputes over the use of headscarves by Dutch waitresses or French schoolgirls, the rise in anti-Semitic violence linked to immigrants or the growth of Islamophobia, Europeans have not yet found a way to smooth away the rough edges associated with international migration.

20. (U) Migration management and the embracing of immigrants to contribute to the social and economic fabric is one area where Europe looks to the U.S. for a possible model. Although Europeans have traditionally resisted the notion that they are an "area of immigration," the reality is otherwise; EC officials are now begin to perceive the need to highlight the benefits of controled immigration in order to foster greater toleration of migrants by European citizens.

SCHNABEL